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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 000373

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WHA FOR A/S NORIEGA, PDAS DERHAM, WHA/BSC
NSC FOR TOM SHANNON
USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2015

TAGS: [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AR](#) [US](#) [CUBA](#)

SUBJECT: GOA CALLS IN AMBASSADOR TO COMPLAIN ABOUT CONSULAR
INFORMATION SHEET; CUBA DISCUSSED

REF: LLORENS-MATERA/LLORENS-BREIER E-MAILS OF 2/15

Classified By: Ambassador Lino Gutierrez for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) Reacting to sensationalist stories in Clarin and La Nacion about the description of Argentina in the Consular Information Sheet on February 16 (reftel), Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa and Tourism Secretary Enrique Meyer held a press conference that night to take issue with our Consular Information Sheet. Bielsa said the GoA had been "surprised" by the report, which was inaccurate and not objective. He took issue with our description of bombings, terrorism in the Tri-border region, and said that piqueteros posed an "infinitesimal" danger to tourists. That said, Bielsa opined that the report had been a "technical" and not a "political" one. Meyer cited figures of over 200,809 U.S. tourists visiting Argentina, and listed only 162 amcit complaints received by the tourist police. Bielsa said he would be calling me in to discuss the matter. Later that night his secretary asked if I could come in, and we agreed to meet at

SIPDIS

11:45 the following day.

2. (U) Prior to the meeting, I went on a morning radio show to explain our position, i.e.,

- a. The United States does not wish to discourage tourists from visiting Argentina -- quite the contrary. But
- b. The United States wants its tourists to have the most up-to-date and accurate information.
- c. The U.S. issues these reports for all the countries in the world. Many reports, including those of European nations, neighboring countries and others, report on the crime situation in those countries, and in many cases crime in these countries is far more serious than in Argentina.
- d. The Argentina report is almost the same as the ones issued six months ago and a year ago. The situation in Argentina has improved, and the reports reflect that.
- e. Asked if I thought U.S.-Argentina relations were good, I said that from our standpoint they were, and cited the Scioli-Cheney meeting, and recent public events, such as the donation of 11 vehicles to Argentine law enforcement, and an event attended by the VP and GoA officials hosted by an American company which is expanding operations in Argentina.

3. (U) Major newspapers picked up my remarks immediately and posted them on their web sites.

4. (C) I met with Bielsa at the appointed time on February 17. He had heard my interview on the radio. He did not/not ask for a retraction or any changes to the CIS, but asked if the U.S. would be willing to receive statistics and information from the GoA in order to assure "a more accurate report." I told him we would be glad to receive such information. I explained (and he obviously knew) that we issue CISs for all countries in the world. Bielsa indicated that President Kirchner had asked him to call me in after reading the newspaper reports. I said it was too bad that this had happened at a time when we were building momentum in the relationship, and cited the three events in paragraph 4, letter e above. This is an important year in our relations, culminating with the Summit of the Americas and the expected visit of President Bush. I said we had been exploring the possibility of a meeting between the FM and Secretary Rice. "That would be excellent," he said.

5. (C) I also said that Kirchner's planned trip to Cuba (ref e-mail) in May, if undertaken as expected, would complicate any high-level meetings that might be envisioned. (NOTE: On February 15, Under Secretary for Political Affairs Ambassador Roberto Garcia Moritan confirmed to DCM that press reporting of that day was accurate and that plans were in the works for a Kirchner trip to Cuba in May. DCM conveyed our disappointment, but reiterated that Washington would be very concerned if Kirchner, a man with strong credentials in the human rights arena, traveled to Cuba and failed to meet with the dissidents on the island. Garcia Moritan responded that the press reporting was accurate and that Kirchner had plans to meet with Cuban dissidents, but that he did not have any further details since substantive planning had not begun.

Moritan agreed to keep us informed as trip plans unfolded.
END NOTE) If Kirchner decides to go, it would be imperative that he meet with dissidents, I emphasized. Bielsa said he would pass my comments to the President. Bielsa described the Cubans as unreliable and difficult to deal with. He said the U.S. should bear in mind two principles from which Argentina will not waver:

- a. The GoA will continue its efforts to secure the travel of dissident Dr. Hilda Molina to Argentina.
- b. First Lady Cristina Kirchner has stated that a sine qua non for her travel to Cuba was to be able to meet with the "white handkerchief" wives/mothers of dissidents.

16. (U) After the meeting, the MFA spokesman said that the FM and I had had a "cordial" meeting. He said that the U.S. had not apologized for the report, but that I had agreed to receive information from the GoA. The matter appears closed for now.

17. (C) Comment: Once again, President Kirchner and the GoA have reacted somewhat to a newspaper article in the Argentine press. On Cuba, our message has been unequivocal: any trip to Cuba by Kirchner has to include a meeting with dissidents. Kirchner seems to want to travel to Cuba - a move that would be popular among his leftist constituency - but the Castro regime is not making it easy for him to go.
GUTIERREZ